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NNB News : 2013 : 11 : 19 : Church Volunteers Believe Their Work is a Spiritual Experience

Lori Castellano

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CHURCH VOLUNTEERS BELIEVE THEIR WORK IS A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

BY LORI CASTELLANO
NNB Student Reporter

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Every third Thursday of the month the Greater Mt. Zion Church located in St. Petersburg, Fla.'s Midtown area feeds the hungry and people who need some extra food supplies.

The program, which started two years ago in partnership with Feeding America, continues to drop off an average of 300 boxes of food ranging from meat, milk, fruit, vegetables, bread, snacks and juice, until it runs out. It never has food left over.

Bertha Searcy, a church member, has been donating her time since the beginning and is busy trying to organize all of the volunteers and the cleanup.

"I started two years ago, and we do this till we run out," she said.

More than 20 volunteers show up today wearing green shirts that read "Greater Mt. Zion AME – Working For The Community."

Helen Evans, church parishioner, knows it's not just a church effort but a community effort.

"Alpine Health & Rehab comes out to help us too," she said.

Evans asks people to sign their name on a log sheet to get a headcount on who is receiving the donations when a man walks up to sign in.

Gilbert Albritton, Midtown resident, "I drove by and saw all the green shirts and wanted to check it out," he said.

Albritton looks over at the tables to see what food is left. One of the volunteers informs him all that is left are tomatoes and some juice.

"This is my first time here, and I'm going to get a couple of tomatoes," he said.

Searcy, who is tired and starting to feel the sun's heat, "We start at nine and go usually two hours and set up and take down. We do this once a month, the third Thursday of the month," she said.

While it can be hard work for the volunteers, some see it as a rewarding experience.

Eva Williams, church member, "I really enjoy doing this," she said.

Food has not kept up with demand. "We do run out of food sooner but have kept the same donations."

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Another resident who regularly picks up some food is James Gamble. "I come every time they have it; been here three times already," he said.

Gamble, a retired cab driver and roofer, cannot work anymore because of health issues.

"I pick up little things at the food pantry about twice a week, but they have everything here," he said.

It's not uncommon to see people stay after picking up their food. Gamble sits down and talks to another member of the community.

"If you hang around here long enough, you will find a good story," Gamble said.

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